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ABSTRACT

As part of its dropout prevention efforts, the state of Florida offers currently enrolled high school students the opportunity to earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. This new graduation option for at-risk students makes frequent use of computer-assisted instruction, operates a counseling component, integrates vocational education with the program, awards academic credits based on mastery, and helps students gain coping strategies. The number of Florida school districts using the GED option has grown from 16 in 1990-91 to 33 in 1993-94, with the number of participating students increasing from 186 to 1,144. More than 75 percent of the students usually pass the GED test each school year. As a result, more than half of the students are still in school, others have moved to other programs, and only 15 percent have dropped out. A follow-up study 3 years later of the 60 students who had exited the GED program (and could be found) showed that they earned more than their counterparts who were either traditional high school graduates or dropouts from the same school districts. They were employed at about the same rate as traditional graduates (54 percent) and at a much higher rate than that of dropouts (42 percent). (A matrix included in the report provides a brief highlight of the essential features of the program for the 1993-94 school year, district by district.) (KC)

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Florida's Use of the GED With At-Risk High School Students Fourth Annual Report 1993 - 1994 School Year

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

Personal dilemmas of the students are one dimension of some of the problems facing Florida educators in the 1990's. Additionally, we experience a constant migration of international and non-Floridians within and throughout our state's school system. Each year, the Florida public school system grows by about 100,000 students! Teachers have voiced a frustration with both increasing class size and diversity of the student population. Although the acceleration rate of population growth in Florida has decreased since the 1970's, in 1990, Florida ranked fourth in the number of people moving into the state (Hodgkinson, 1992). Student growth within the Florida educational system continues unabated at a time when the economy squeezes school districts, taxpayers and employment opportunities. Societal pressures concentrate themselves in the schoolhouses, and educators are faced with the challenge of enabling each student to become successful.

Personal dilemmas and the shifting, culturally divergent population cause Florida school leaders to seek alternative educational strategies to fulfill each student's dream. For all these reasons, Florida has undertaken a variety of divergent Dropout Prevention alternatives in high schools. Based upon permission from the American Council on Education (ACE), this Dropout Prevention option uses the General Educational Development Examination (GED) with currently enrolled high school students.

In March, 1990, then Commissioner Betty Castor requested permission of the ACE to allow the GED to be used at the high school level, but not as an early exit option. This new graduation option for at-risk transitioning students included several required elements within the Dropout Prevention Programs:

- provide a substantive educational program -- either academic, vocational or both;
- provide adequate instructional resources;
- select students who conform to Dropout Prevention guidelines and have not been successful in school and describe those students, including race and gender;
- provide counseling services;
- provide adequate State GED technical support;
- conduct ongoing evaluation of the option's impact on the operation of Florida's existing GED program, and
- conduct a qualitative analysis of student, parent, teacher, administrator and community satisfaction with the program.

As Dropout Prevent Programs began incorporating the GED in 1990-1991, sixteen school districts obtained permission to operate such an option through the

DOE Dropout Prevention Office. The following table indicates growth in student participation for the GED exit option.

Year	Number of Districts	Enrolled Students	GED Tested	Percent Passed
1990-91	16	748	186	79%
1991-92	24	1,531	635	65%
1992-93	28	2,469	825	76%
1993-94	33	3,601	1,144	76%

Several features of Dropout Prevention Program options that include preparation for the GED stand apart from some of the traditional school programs:

- frequent use of Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI)
- operation of a regular counseling component
- integration of vocational education, training and certification offered in some programs
- where the traditional high school program promotes students at the end of the school year, this alternative advances students, awarding academic credits, based upon individual student mastery.
- a regular planned avenue in which students can gain additional coping strategies (counseling) not found in the traditional school environment

RESULTS

Program Results

Status of Program Participants

More than half of the Dropout Prevention Program students using the GED exit option are still in school. The majority of these are still in the GED option, but some have transferred to other Dropout Prevention Programs, returned to regular high school or exited to Adult Education programs. Only 15% dropped out.

Student Status	Number/Percent
<i>Still Enrolled in Program</i>	12,09 (33.6%)
<i>Returned to Regular School</i>	273 (7.6%)
<i>Enrolled in Another Dropout Prevention Option</i>	42 (1.2%)
<i>Enrolled In Adult Education</i>	267 (8%)
<i>Moved</i>	113 (3.2%)
<i>Dropped Out</i>	533 (14.8%)
<i>Graduated</i>	1,030 (28.6%)
<i>Unknown</i>	111 (3%)

Sixty-six percent of the graduates earned a school-specific standard high school diploma, or a district (non-school specific) standard high school diploma (13%). Others (47%) earned a Florida High School Diploma (also referred to as a GED diploma). Some received more than one document. A district-by-district profile is presented in the full report.

There was little difference in the percentage of males and females taking the GED; 31% of the male population took the exam compared to 33% of the females. There was also little difference in the percentage of males and females who passed the exam (males - 75%, females - 73%).

Racially, the passing proportions are consistent with other nationally standardized tests. For the White test takers, 80% (605) passed; Black 58% (161) passed; Hispanic 72% (70) passed; Asian 80% (9) passed, and Native American 33% (1) passed.

Student Outcomes Beyond School -- FETPIP Results

By examining former students functioning within the community after leaving high school, an understanding of the impact of the program can be observed. The Florida Education Training Placement and Information Program (FETPIP) explores several data bases within the state to observe employment, continuing education, welfare receipt and a few other variables. Students who exited Dropout Prevention Programs using the GED in 1991 were reviewed three years out of school (between October and December, 1993). A FETPIP search located information for 59.5% of the those former students. At that point they earned more than their counterparts who were either traditional high school

graduates or dropouts from the same school districts. They were found to be employed at about the same rate as traditional graduates -- 53% and 54% respectively -- much higher than the 42% dropout employment rate.

The Class of 1991 demonstrates that the in-high school GED graduates not only maintained their economic advantage, but actually had the highest quarterly earning increases, up some 43% from the prior year! This is in relation to traditional graduates earning 30% more and dropouts earning 23% more, three years after leaving school.

Students from the GED exit option have higher participation in public assistance (10%) when they first leave school compared to traditional graduates (4.4%), although that rate is not as high as for dropouts (16.6%). Reliance on welfare by the 1991 GED students diminished to 7.8% and became almost indiscernible from a traditional high school graduate (5.6%) after three years out of school. At the same time, public assistance data for 1991 dropouts showed an increasing dependency over time to 19.8% three years after leaving school.

The combination of continued strong employment, with substantial raises along the way, as well as diminishing reliance upon public assistance speaks directly at the significance and impact of the Dropout Prevention alternative. More dramatically, as the indicators of self-sufficiency increase for this group, the data for dropouts present quite a different picture. The proportion employed increased 9% over three years, but this left more than half still not found working in Florida. Salary increases were relatively meager for the dropouts, and welfare dependency expanded to one-in-five. For graduates, public assistance went down. Stark differences present themselves over time when contrasting what the GED students could have been without graduating!

Continuing education showed the greatest disparity for the high school GED recipients. Only 11% of the Class of 1991 were involved in continuing education, compared with 37% of the traditional graduates and 7% of the dropouts. For the most recent data available, the picture is not much different. Some 18% of the Class of 1993 who took the GED in high school are in continuing education, compared to 47% of traditional graduates and 15% of the dropouts. For what proportion of the GED graduates post-secondary education plans are goals is unknown.

Demographic Results of Year Four Survey Data

Age

Students participating in Dropout Prevention Programs that incorporated the GED exit option ranged in age from 15 - 21 years, with the majority of the

participants being 17 or 18 (69%), and 57% were 18 or older. The mean age was 17.74. Only one-fifth of the participants are considered overage for high school (19 or older). Last year over one-third of the participants were 19 or older.

Race

Ethnic Group	GED Dropout Prevention	Regular High School Enrollment
<i>White</i>	2,479 (70%)	60%
<i>Black</i>	827 (23%)	23%
<i>Hispanic</i>	261 (7%)	15%
<i>Asian</i>	19	2%
<i>Native American</i>	9	.2%
<i>Undeclared</i>	4	--

Sex and Race

Males outnumbered females in this option. Approximately 60% of the total population was male, and 40% was female. Similar male-female enrollment distributions were also observed for individual racial groups, with the exception of the Black population. For this group, the percentages were reversed; 56% of the Black GED at-risk students were female and 44% were male.

Program Delivery System Features

Across the state, widely different strategies function to best serve the unique characteristics of the students. Results of this fourth year of study show that more mature option offerings not only provide a more coherent structure, they tend to grow each year, serving more and more students. In several cases, districts that have provided this GED graduation option have expanded from one or two high schools to most high schools in the county. Newer district options typically struggle with the constellation of elements (academics, counseling and vocational education) vying for its space, often as isolated components. With time, each district approach evolves into a more holistic system having a smoother balance between requirements and activities.

Some examples of enhanced characteristics existing in mature district strategies include:

- Integration of computer-based instruction with teacher-led activities including group assignments and reports.
- Experience in the application of counseling techniques -- building of counselor resources and individual counseling services.
- Development of business partnerships and mentors to work with the students, often integrated within vocational and job skill training.
- Program flexibility and scheduling (i.e., late afternoon, night and weekend classes).
- Program integration within the regular high school which enables students to actively be a part of all school activities. This is in contrast to students being isolated in a portable or having limited access to vocational programs located miles away.
- Integration of aspects from both Dropout Prevention and Adult Education in terms of pretesting students to identify readiness for taking the GED, instructional resources, etc.

The following, matrix provides a brief highlight of the essential features for the 1993-94 school year, district-by-district. Generally, over the past three years, this matrix has contained consistent data points. Long-running approaches have evolved and fine-tuned their operations. In some cases, information gained over the years has been useful in planning variations at other high schools or even creating additional Dropout Prevention Programs at the middle school level. The diversity of the student population forces the issue of both teachers and programs operating in a flexible manner. Many of the students come from environments wherein they must work to support themselves or their families (siblings, parents or children). They may have experienced encounters with the legal system themselves or through their families.

An expanded table in the Appendix of the full report provides much more comprehensive information. Among those significant factors contributing to success are:

- administrative support and encouragement continuing from the school level through the superintendent and school board;
- availability of resources to develop and expand the program;
- proximity and value of vocational offerings;
- community size, continuing education and employment possibilities, and
- local impetus to establish these GED exit option strategies (e.g. high dropout rates).

Matrix of Each Program's Drop Out Prevention Operations and Features

	Separate from regular school	Peer interaction	Vocational Instruction	Vocational Inst. at high school	Vocational Certification	Work experience	Employability skills	Performance based	Computers or CAI	Non-computer academics	Grading System	Earn credits	Electives	Attendance requirements	Extended hours	Promotion/ retention policy	High School Specific Diploma	District diploma	Official GED Practice Test	Curriculum Framework
ALACHUA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	C	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X
BAKER		X	X	X				X	J	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
BAY	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	J,O		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
BRADFORD	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	J	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
BREVARD		X	X	X		X	X	X	J		X	X	X	X			X			X
BROWARD*	*	X	*	*	*	*	X	X	J*	X	X	X	X	X		X	*	*	*	X
CALHOUN	X	X	X	X			X		O	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
CHARLOTTE	X	X				X	X	X	S,O		X	X	X	X			X		X	X
CLAY		X	X	X	X	X	X	*	J	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
# COLUMBIA																				
DADE		X				X	X	X	O		X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
DUVAL	X	X	X		X	X	X		C	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
ESCAMBIA*		X	X	X		X	X	*	C	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
HAMILTON		X	X	X	X	X		X	J	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
# HARDEE																				
• HENDRY																				
HERNANDO		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	C	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
HIGHLANDS		X	X		X	X		X	J		X		X	X		X		X		X
INDIAN RIVER		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	J	X	X		X	X		X	X			X
JACKSON		X	X	X			X		O	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X

*Multiple programs operating in district, not all programs have these features

No one enrolled in 93-94

•Students in DOP program exit to Adult Ed for GED option

C=Computer Curriculum Corporation

J = Jostens/WICAT

S=Skills Bank II

O=Other

Matrix of Each Program's Drop Out Prevention Operations and Features

		Separate from regular school	Peer interaction	Vocational Instruction	Vocational Inst. at high school	Vocational Certification	Work experience	Employability skills	Performance based	Computers or CAI	Non-computer academics	Grading System	Earn credits	Electives	Attendance requirements	Extended hours	Promotion/ retention policy	High School Specific Diploma	District diploma	Official GED Practice Test	Curriculum Framework
#	LAFAYETTE		X	X	X			X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X
	LAKE																				
	LEE*	*	X	*	*	*	X	*	*	J,S,O	*	X	*	*	X		*	*	*	*	*
	LEON		X				X		X	O	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	
	MANATEE*		X	X		X	X	X	X	J	X	X	*	X	X	*	X	X		X	X
	MARION	X	X	X							X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
	MARTIN		X				X	X	X	J	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X
	OKEECHOBEE		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	J	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
	ORANGE		X	X		X	X	X		O	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
#	OSCEOLA																				
8	PASCO*		*	X	*	X	*	X	X	C	*	X	X		X	X	*	X	*	X	X
	POLK*	*	*	*	*		*	*	X	J,O*	*	X	*	*	*	*	*	*	X	X	X
	PUTNAM		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	J	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
	SANTA ROSA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	S,O	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
	SARASOTA	X	X	X			X	X	X	J	X	X			X				X	X	X
	SEMINOLE		X	X	X		X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
	SUWANEE																				
	TAYLOR	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	C	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
	WAKULLA	X	X	X					X	S,O	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
	WALTON	X	X	X		X		X	X	S,O	X			X					X	X	X

*Multiple programs operating in district, not all programs
have these features

no one enrolled in 93-94

C=Computer Curriculum Corporation

J = Jostens/WICAT

S=Skills Bank II

O=Other

State and Local Technical Assistance

By design, this is a unique graduation option that functions somewhat as a hybrid by offering alternative education programs for high school graduation (Dropout Prevention Programs), while using the GED (Adult Education) as the validating measure of academic accomplishment.

Local Adult Education programs provide the GED testing component and tend to be familiar with GED preparatory materials. In some cases, intradistrict communication is still developing between instructors of these secondary education options and local adult educators. Inconsistencies in the use of the G77 code for Dropout Prevention students taking the GED, is one indicator of improvements yet to be attained.

Substantial mis-matches exist between student result data obtained for the research directly from the districts and data generated as part of the GED registration process. For 1994, the GED database showed 1,332 Dropout Prevention Takers and the district data indicated 1,144. Additionally, GED test data showing students with a "G77" code (meaning a Dropout Prevention high school student) existed for seven counties that were not operating and did not seek DOE permission for the programs. Based on this discrepancy, data collection for the research will continue to be required directly from Dropout Prevention Programs.

The bulk of assistance, in terms of academic development, has been provided to local educators by the five regional Dropout Prevention Coordinators with support from the state Dropout Prevention Office. Surveys completed by district staff indicated that consistent help was available from these individuals. Surveys also described substantial cooperation from the local GED testing staff in terms of arranging special test sites and times, as well as prompt and efficient test processing and return of results to aid in timely graduation for successful candidates.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY

Three primary elements have been used over the years to gather data for observations, along with two other data sources. For 1993 - 1994:

- ☛ surveys were sent to school districts that are currently using the GED exit option

- ☛ site visits were conducted in Charlotte, Lee, and Pasco Counties wherein administrators, teachers and students were interviewed regarding program operation and student characteristics
- ☛ follow-up data were gathered for graduates of this Dropout Prevention Program, their Traditional High School Graduate counterparts, and High School Dropouts -- all from the same districts that are operating this option.

The Department of Education's FETPIP data collection system observed these three groups for fiscal quarters between October and December, on an annual basis. CNAP continues to use FETPIP to longitudinally observe the same three groups every year. Therefore, the current research contains a three-year view of the 1990-91 graduates and dropouts; a two-year view for 1991-92, etc.

- An unsuccessful attempt was made in the third year of data-gathering to mail brief surveys to graduated students of the GED exit option. Although post-high school addresses and permission to contact individuals was obtained while students were still in school, almost none of the distributed surveys were returned. Since fewer than 5% were returned, the results were deemed uninterpretable and not compiled. For the future, CNAP will develop a form for local school personnel use in attempting to gather information. CNAP will aggregate such follow-up data as part of the statewide report.
- Some teachers and administrators for this option across the state have remained in contact with program graduates. They shared anecdotal information with CNAP regarding life for these students, years after graduation, which is presented in the Student Profiles chapter.

A significant element of the research conducted by The Center for Needs Assessment and Planning (CNAP) has been to determine what has subsequently happened to students who were in the 1990-1991, 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 programs and graduated. Once graduated, it has taken time to enter new phases of life -- continuing education, working, family life, etc. This research explored some of these activities for the period between October and December for each year since 1991. An analysis was conducted using Florida Education Training Placement and Information Program (FETPIP) data to compare employment opportunities among three student groups for each graduating year, with multi-year, longitudinal data now available as follows:

- program participants (graduates)
- traditional high school graduates
- high school dropouts

In-depth descriptions are contained in the Results section of the full report on information gathered for:

Demographics of Enrolled Students

- age
- race
- sex

Program Characteristics

- counseling component
- curriculum materials and academic placement
- faculty characteristics
- meeting academic requirements
- program operations
- state and local technical assistance

Program Results for those using the GED exit option

- status of program participants
- GED component
- student outcomes -- FETPIP results



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